JUSTICE
ALWAYS
WINS.
DEATH NOTE

JUSTICE ALWAYS WINS

Five Officers in a Bar

"I think you should slow down," Mogi says, setting his chopsticks down on the table.

Aizawa nods vigorously from across the booth, jabbing a finger in Matsuda's face. The dim lighting of the bar casts odd shadows over his face. "I told you! You always drink way too much whenever we go out like this."

"I was talking to both of you," Mogi deadpans, ignoring the shout-laugh-thing Matsuda makes in response. He likes all his coworkers, but Aizawa and Matsuda can be a bit much sometimes.

On the opposite side of the spectrum is Himura, who is easy to get along with but difficult to befriend. Yagami is a happy medium, but, then, he's known Mogi for years. It's hardly fair to compare them. Mogi himself is more talkative than Yagami, perhaps, but he's nothing like Aizawa and Matsuda. God forbid. (With all respect to Aizawa and Matsuda, of course.)

He turns to Yagami, glancing down momentarily at

his glass. "You've barely touched your drink. Are you feeling alright?"

Yagami looks back at him with that same grim, melancholic look he always has on his face. "I'm fine. Just tired."

"What about you, Himura?"

Himura's eyes widen just slightly, as if she hadn't expected to be spoken to. "I feel fine. It was nice of Matsuda to invite everyone out like this."

"If only Matsuda would pay, too," Aizawa interjects, breaking out from whatever squabble he had been having with exactly the topic of discussion.

"What?" Matsuda exclaims, voice loud and uneven from alcohol. "I make less than you! I probably make less than everyone here!"

"You don't have to tell the whole bar about how much you make, Matsuda," Mogi says.

The five of them have very little in common outside of work, honestly; sometimes Mogi wonders what will

happen to them after the Kira case ends (assuming they survive, but no, best not think about that). Mogi and Yagami have been friends for over a decade now, and Aizawa and Matsuda are—friends? something?, but their group dynamic mostly orbits around an all-including respect for Yagami Soichiro. Sometimes Mogi feels like he's inadvertently forced to be Aizawa and Matsuda's third stooge, but he doesn't have a deep relationship with either of them. Himura is impossible to get a read on. Outings like this are few and far between—in fact, this may be the first of its kind. It very well could be the last, too.

"You know," Matsuda suddenly says, leaning forward over the table, "I just realized that we don't know anything about you, Himura. Do you have any hobbies? Any family?"

"Most of my hobbies are athletic activities, like dancing and jogging, but I also like reading," Himura says automatically, as if she had rehearsed the answer before. "I'm not close with my family, and I'm also not married or seeing anyone."

"Matsuda isn't seeing anyone, either," Aizawa says.

Matsuda's face turns somehow redder than it already was in a vulgar combination of alcohol and embarrassment. "Hey! Don't try to set me and Himura up together! It's weird to date your coworker!"

"I wasn't trying to set you up together!" Aizawa argues, grinning uncharacteristically. Both of them are being awfully loud. "I just thought everyone should know that you can't get a girlfriend."

"But you're single, too," Matsuda mumbles loudly, making a sniffling noise. Mogi has never heard someone mumble loudly before.

"Both of you, calm down," Yagami says tiredly. "There's nothing wrong with being single."

Coming from him, the statement is both immeasurably funny and immeasurably sad at the same time.

Mogi turns his attention back to Himura, sighing apologetically. "I'm sorry about them. They tend to overdo the sake. It's no excuse, but they don't mean anything by it."

"It's alright. All of you have my respect. I can't see anything changing that." Himura's posture is stiff as she says it, expression serious, but that's nothing new. She seems earnest, at least. "In any case, I should be leaving. It's getting late."

"I guess it is," Mogi says, glancing at his watch. He thinks of asking if she's okay to drive, but come to think of it, he doesn't think she's had anything to drink except water all night.

Himura is certainly an enigma. Out of everyone on the task force, she sticks out as not quite like the rest of them, always on the outskirts of conversation. Mogi doesn't think it's because she's a woman—generally, none of them treat her any differently than they would a male coworker—but he wonders, sometimes, if she ever feels alienated for it anyways. Hopefully not; after all, her otherness is something Himura seems to facilitate herself, carrying out her work mostly silently and only voicing her opinion at times of importance. He respects her for that; sometimes, he wishes he was more like her, even though he would never really try to be. Besides Yagami himself, she must be the most reliable person on the task force.

She says her goodbyes quickly, then disappears into the yellow light of the bar.

"I should leave soon, too," Yagami says, shifting back towards the table. "I haven't been getting enough sleep lately as it is."

"Do you think you'll go home tonight?" Mogi asks.

"I don't know. Light and Sayu will be asleep."

"You might as well. You must miss your bed sometimes."

Yagami lapses into silence, the way he often does in moments like these. Aizawa and Matsuda have gone from arguing to trying to remember the lyrics of a pop song.

"Let me pay for your drink," Mogi says suddenly, gesturing towards Yagami's almost-full glass. "You've barely touched it."

Yagami shakes his head. "No, I can't let you do that."

"Just let me do it," Mogi insists. "You've got two children to take care of. I don't have any family—I only have to provide for myself."

"Mogi—"

"It's just one drink, Chief. I want to do it."

"If it's what you want," Yagami concedes with a barely-audible sigh. "But I don't like having you buy things for me."

"I'd do it more if I could." Mogi shrugs, changing the subject. "Have you decided whether or not you'll go home tonight?"

Yagami is quiet for a moment. "Not tonight. L probably has something else for me to do by now. And I'm never sure how to talk to Light, these days."

"You should take some time off once the case finishes and spend some time with him. Sayu, too."

"L doesn't seem to think that'll be possible," Yagami says grimly.

Mogi doesn't reply for a second, then rests a comforting hand on Yagami's shoulder. It hurts him to see his friend dealing with this impossible dilemma, and he'd do more to comfort him if he could. Then again, Yagami has never been one for hugs.

"L is wrong, then," Mogi says. "It'll all work itself out—we'll work it out. Don't worry about it too much. You do enough already."

Yagami gives Mogi a look that might be grateful. "There's only one way to find out. All the more reason for me to get back to work now."

"Alright," Mogi says with a nod.

Yagami isn't quite the same man he was when he and Mogi first met. He is still diligent, serious, full of limitless integrity—in many ways, he seems like the ideal man. Still, he's just as stubborn, and Mogi has never seen him stirred by another person's plea for his well-being—not Mogi's, not his children's, not his late wife's. When they first became friends, Mogi had idealized Yagami, he'll admit that now. Years of companionship have taught him not to;

Yagami is a good man, but not a perfect one. Mogi doesn't fault him for that. But Yagami does make him sad sometimes, with his grim voice and his insistent self-sacrifice and the melancholy behind his eyes. A man as absorbed in his work as Yagami is never stops to mourn; the grief stews until it's a part of him.

Mogi almost offers to walk with him to his car, but then he's reminded that he'll be the only mostly-sober one left after Yagami leaves, so instead he just waves and tells him to drive safely. With a quiet sigh, he turns his attention back to Aizawa and Matsuda.

"Sometimes it just feels like you don't like me at all," Matsuda is complaining tearfully.

"Hey, hey, don't stay stuff like that. Of course I like you," Aizawa says, leaning towards Matsuda.

"You don't act like it," he sniffles. "You're always mean to me, even when I haven't done anything wrong."

"I don't mean it like that."

"Then why do you do it?"

"Uh..."

Mogi isn't sure if he's watching a tragedy or a comedy or a romance.

He clears his throat. "Hey, you two. How much longer do you want to stay here for?"

"I want to go home," Matsuda mumbles.

"Come on, Matsuda, don't be like that," Aizawa argues. "We never go out like this anymore."

"But I'm starting to feel sick."

Aizawa leans back away. "Okay, let's go."

Matsuda sticks out among them, too, but for the opposite reason Himura does. Constantly upbeat and almost childlike, throwing himself into (almost) every task with enthusiasm and optimism, he certainly brings energy to the workplace in a way that few do in this line of work—hell, in a way that few do in general. For all the griping his colleagues give

Matsuda, Mogi doesn't really think he's that bad, just a bit impulsive and talkative. He is, at his core, a nice person, and the world could use more of those, even if he doesn't always have the best judgment.

Aizawa, funnily enough, doesn't always have the best judgment, either, but he'd never admit that. His main hobby seems to be grumbling at Matsuda, but Mogi figures that if Aizawa actually disliked Matsuda that much he wouldn't go out of his way to be around him. He's higher-ranked than Matsuda, but really only in name; the two of them function more or less as equals, even if Aizawa complains more. Despite Aizawa's sometimes thorny demeanor, though, Mogi has seen him do awfully kind things before. He strikes Mogi as by and large an empathetic person.

Mogi leads them both out of the bar once they've paid, thumbs hooked in his pockets. It's dark outside, and the air is cool against his face.

For his own part, Mogi thinks he has a solid head on his shoulders. He's not sure what else to say—he's never been particularly fond of introspection. He

shows up to work every day because there's a job to be done, and he tolerates the oddities and eccentricities of his colleagues (and his new boss) with as much grace as he can. Sometimes he enjoys them. He has his limits, of course, and there are certain things he won't take sitting down, but he thinks he does a good, balanced job overall. Not to toot his own horn.

But, hey. He really does deserve some praise, since he's about to drive Aizawa and Matsuda home and they're going to argue the entire time. C'est la vie.

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JUSTICE ALWAYS WINS
15

JUSTICE

A Series of Willful Requests

Wammy has never seen a child quite like L Lawliet.

Any child would be traumatized by the death of their parents; that isn't what Wammy finds so different about him. The prolonged silences, the occasional outbursts, the moodiness—these things are all par for the course. It's more than that. It's in the way he sits, in the way he looks at others, in his tone of voice, in the very words he uses—they are **PARTICULAR**. Which isn't to say that being particular is a bad thing, because Wammy doesn't think it's a bad thing; and it isn't to say that there aren't other particular people out there, because Wammy has met plenty of them (even he is particular, in several ways). Even among all those particular people, though, L stands out.

He is smarter, for one thing, than possibly anyone Wammy has ever met, despite being all of five years old. He seems almost adult-like at times, in an odd way. He is also more direct than any five-year-old Wammy has ever met, which is like being the wettest glass of water. In other words, very impressive.

("I'm a boy," L had said to him, staring out the window of Wammy's car. They had been the first words L had spoken since leaving his former home. "No one believes me, but I know I'm a boy. If you won't treat me like one, I won't stay with you."

Wammy had blinked a few times and said, "Well, of course," and that was that.)

It's snowing when they finally get to Wammy's home, after several car rides and plane flights across the globe. L looks up at it, expression unreadable and hands clutched at his sides, as if he can evaluate its worth just from a glance. Wammy tries to smile encouragingly, but L doesn't seem to notice.

He shows L to his room first. It's large, painted blue and filled with toys and books and anything else a child could want, including a notepad and a pack of pencils. Immediately, L picks out a pencil and begins walking around the room, searching through every corner with cautious prods and scribbling words in his notepad. Finally, he returns to the doorway, holding the notepad up for Wammy to take.

When Wammy reads it, his eyes go wide. He realizes that it might have been better to let L design his own room from scratch. He looks back down at the child, smiling bewilderedly, and says, "What a willful request!"

—

In the first few months of raising L, Wammy drops most of his other projects to focus on his new career in fatherhood. It isn't a problem; he can certainly afford to, and after all, he had never expected children to be anything less than a time commitment. Wammy only leaves when he has to, bringing L in tow, before he eventually hires someone else to run errands for them, even though he's always hated the idea of having servants.

At the end of those few months, he offers to take L on a vacation, to which L agrees, so long as he can choose where they go and what they do. The itinerary he provides is bizarre and complex and not entirely practical, but Wammy is happy to see him so interested in something.

They arrive at their hotel at a little before noon. Wammy thinks it looks quaint, but he looks down

to find L's eyes frowning from above the white medical mask he insists on wearing every time they leave the house.

"I don't like this," L states.

A wave of concern rises in Wammy's chest. "What do you mean?"

L looks at him, exasperated. "Let's just go to our room."

Wammy leads them up an elevator and down a hallway until they find their room. He goes in first, holding the door open, and lets L walk past him.

Wammy thinks the room looks nice enough, fitted with two well-made beds, comfortable furniture, and a stark white bathroom. L examines the room, though, never touching anything but peering at it all through dark, critical eyes. Finally, he returns to Wammy, holding a page from his notepad in his hands.

"Just as I thought," he says, "this place is filthy. Here."

He hands Wammy the paper.

Wammy reads it over, raising his eyebrows. "Another willful request!"

—

When L is eight, Wammy adopts another child—or two, really. Near's hair is unnaturally pale and their demeanor is unusually quiet, even more than L had been when Wammy first took him under his wing. Mello, less so (although the hair is of course the same). Wammy supposes that they're both grieving in their own ways. He'll admit that some of this is a bit out of his depth.

L is suspicious of this new child at first. Wammy tries to introduce them as gradually as he can, but that only goes so far when he's trying to single-handedly raise them both at the same time. L and Mello in particular seem off to a bad start.

One night, though, Wammy wakes up from uneasy dreams to find the door to Near's room ajar. He almost panics, but when he opens the door, all he finds is L and Near putting a puzzle together. His mouth quite literally falls open.

The next day, L motions him over from his perch at the television. There's a children's program on, which is odd, because L doesn't usually enjoy that kind of thing.

"Yes?" Wammy says, looking over L's shoulder at the TV screen. "What are you watching?"

"I HAVE TO GIVE MY LITTLE BROTHER THE BEST BIRTHDAY PRESENT EVER!" declares the cartoon girl.

"She has to give her little brother the best birthday present ever," L replies seriously.

"I see."

"Near's room is inadequate," L says suddenly, shoving a piece of paper at Wammy.

Wammy takes it. He's barely surprised this time. Still, he says, "Another willful request!"

L frowns. "You always say that."

—

A few days later, L has apparently decided that

Wammy's private library is inadequate, too. He beckons Wammy again, and again hands him a piece of paper. Wammy looks at it, raises his eyebrows, and remembers what L said last time. He bites his tongue.

L looks at him expectantly.

"I'll get it done," Wammy says.

"...Don't you have something else to say?"

Wammy looks back at L for a moment, then, slowly, he smiles. "Another willful request."

—

"I want to start investigating criminal cases," L says one day, not long after his tenth birthday.

The topic has come up before, briefly. Watari nods, pushing a tray of Lucky Charge packets towards him. "I'm sure you'll make a wonderful detective."

"Not someday, Wammy," L replies, sounding

vaguely annoyed. As close as they are, he still insists on calling Wammy by his last name. "Now. You told me that if there was ever anything I wanted to do long term, I could tell you and you would help me do it. This is what I want to do."

Wammy looks at him, blinking. He had seen this coming, truth be told, but it's still a difficult request. Most children want toys and trips to soccer games; L wants to do detective work. He wouldn't have him any other way—it's just that Wammy had never foreseen that this is where his life would take him.

"I'll prepare cold cases for you to look at," he finally concedes. "Anything more is too dangerous until you're older. If you want to make any inquiries, you'll need to use an alias."

"I know. I don't plan to make my identity public," L says, as if he's planning to become the next Sherlock Holmes and gain international intrigue overnight at age ten. "However, I'll need far more than an alias, and so will you."

He produces a piece of paper and extends it to Wammy. "From now on, I need to get in the habit of calling you Watari. Preferably, so should Near and Mello."

Wammy—Watari—stares down at the paper, exhaling slowly. It's dawning on him, slowly, that his life is going to be very different from here on out.

"Another willful request..."

—

"I don't really want anything," Near says modestly, running a brush through the Mello puppet's hair. "A few new puzzles would be nice, but I think I'm fine other than that."

("Take Near's puppet of me and fix it up, that's what you should do!" Mello had grumbled earlier, tossing a dart towards the dartboard hung up on the back of his bedroom door. "I know they carry it around with them everywhere. It's getting unsightly, and they're not good at fixing it yet. It's embarrassing—it's supposed to be **ME!** If you get me a chocolate cake and fix up that damn

puppet, that's good enough for me."

"I'll see to it," Watari had answered nervously, keeping a wide berth from the line of fire. "But please mind your language.")

Watari watches Near's brushing motions. They certainly **TRY** to take care of the puppet, but Mello is right—its wooden face is beginning to look a bit chipped-away at. "Are you sure there isn't anything else you want?"

Near pauses, then looks at Watari, smiling. "I'm serious. Don't worry about it."

Watari nods and leaves, closing the door behind them. He almost jumps out of his skin when he finds L waiting there.

"They're lying," L says quietly.

Watari looks behind him, then begins to walk down the hallway, motioning for L to follow him. "What do you mean?"

"They have more that they want," L clarifies

following after him. "The same goes for Mello. Every 15-year-old has things they want, right?"

"But it's difficult to know what to buy for them," Watari concedes. "I've already given the both of them everything I can think of."

L smirks, holding out a piece of paper. "It's a good thing I know them as well as I do. It's also a good thing you have my imagination to rely on."

Watari looks at the paper, and his eyes nearly bug out of his head. He wonders how much of this list is actually comprised of things Near and Mello want and how much is just L deciding he knows what they want.

"Another willful request," he says, unable to stop himself from smiling.

—

In Watari's many years raising and working with L, he has been scared for him before. More times than he can count, really—not because he doesn't trust L or have faith in his abilities, but because he is his father. Worrying is his job, especially considering

the kind of work L does. He's become accustomed to it, and to keeping his composure in the face of what seems like uncertainty. After all, things are rarely uncertain when L is offering his skeptical eye to watch them.

The Kira case has been something of a change of pace. Watari has never been scared for L quite like this.

"Watari," L says one evening, "I need to ask something of you."

Watari looks up from his ironing board. "Yes?"

L is watching something on his computer screen. He doesn't turn his head, even as he speaks to Watari. "In the case that I die, Near will take over for me and continue my work, both on the Kira case and as L. We agreed on that long ago. When that happens—even if it's soon—I want you to provide them with a complete log of all my past cases, especially my earliest ones, in as much detail as possible. More than anything, I want you to show them my mistakes. I know that Near worries about their own capabilities, and I know that they worry

about my confidence in them even more. I want them to know that I was no more infallible than they are, and that I've never thought of them as less than me. In fact, I have complete faith in them."

Watari stares at him, shocked into silence. Finally, he says, "Why are you saying this now?"

L finally glances at him, a faint smile on his lips. "It's as good a time as any, isn't it?"

"That's..." Watari looks into L's eyes and wonders, desperately, what's going on inside his head right now. But there's no way for him to really know that. Instead, he just shakes his head, swallowing hoarsely. "Another willful request."

—

When they get back to Watari's house, it feels a little quieter. A little more empty.

They don't talk—not because it's painful to, but because it feels like there's so little to say after all that's happened. Like they could sort through all the words for years and years and still be at a

loss. That's how Watari feels, at least.

He never thought he'd lose a child.

"It's good to be home," Near says finally.

"Yes," Watari agrees.

They go from room to room, noting everything that needs to be moved and cleaned and ordered. Near offers to help with the real work later, and Watari almost says no, but he stops himself. They could use the time together, couldn't they?

When they get to L's room, they stop. Watari stares at the door as if it's something massive and insurmountable.

"We don't have to go in right now," Near offers. "I have some ideas for what we could do with this room, though. Things I think he would have liked."

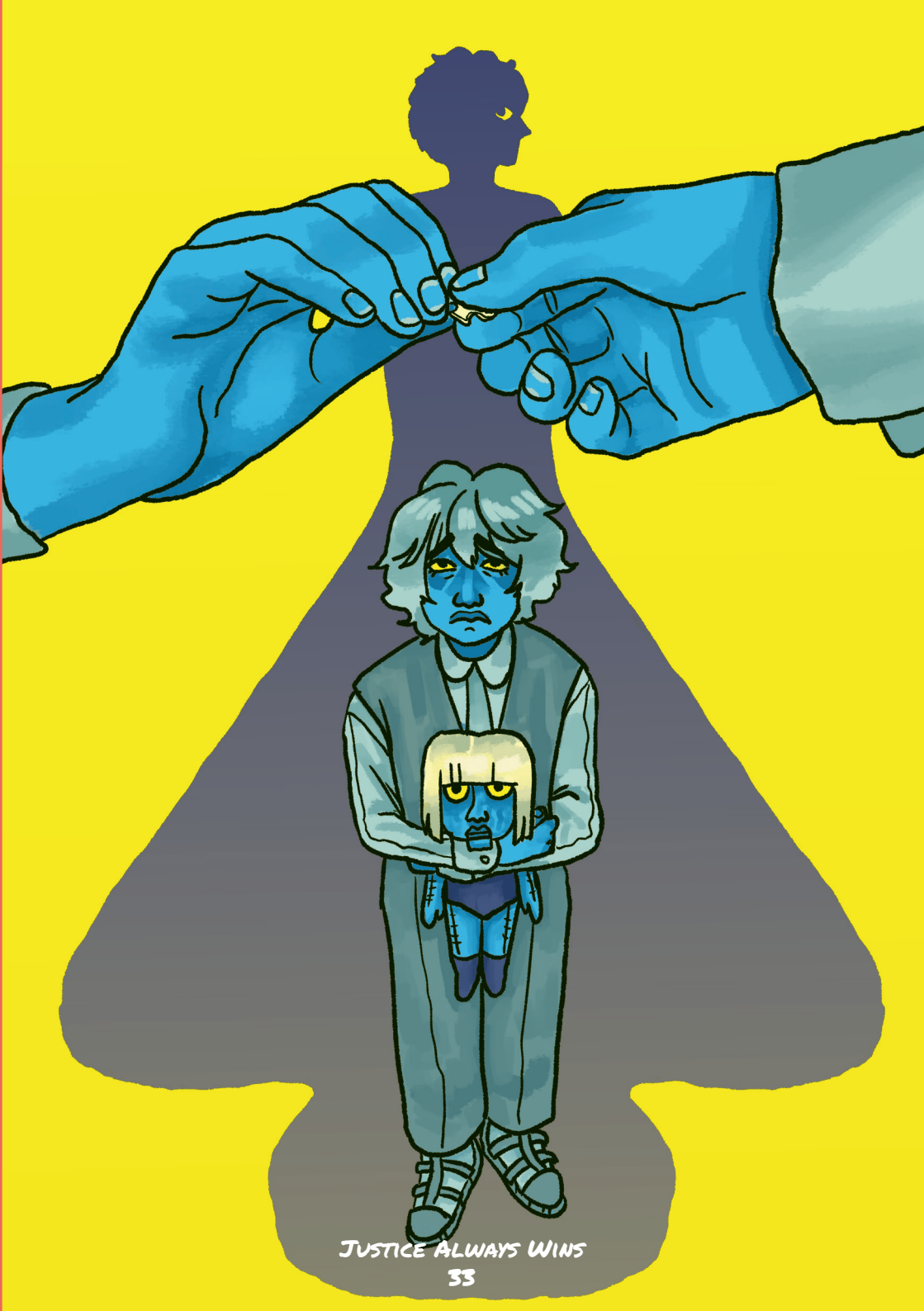
Later, Near calls Watari into their room, and Watari enters to find the whiteboard on the east wall covered with lists and sketches and cost ranges. He has to tilt his head up just to see it all. Does Near

have a ladder in here?

Near walks up behind Watari, following his line of sight. "What do you think?"

Watari follows the writings with his eyes, silently amazed at the amount and quality of it all. Near really has an astounding mind, an astounding talent, an astounding eye for things like this. Their resemblance to L, in many ways, is stronger than they seem to realize.

He almost laughs. "Another willful request."



SO... JUST STOP IT, DAD.
LET'S GO HOME ALREADY...

I'D HAVE WANTED TO BE YOUR FRIEND FOREVER
BUT THIS IS HOW IT HAD TO BE

Happy Places

"Light! Hey, Light! Why is your door locked?"

Light jumps at the sound of Sayu's voice, scrambling to cover the death note with the nearest textbook he can find. He wheels his chair around, looking anxiously at the door. "What is it, Sayu?"

"What do you mean, 'what is it?' It's your birthday, Light!" Sayu calls back, and the pout is audible in her voice. "You can't just stay cooped up in your room tonight! Dad came home and everything! Jeez, why do you have your door locked, anyway?"

Light relaxes, but only barely. Is it really his birthday already? He must have forgotten somehow; he's come close to doing it before. Besides, he's been so focused on being Kira lately that everything else has seemed distant. It's not like he doubts himself, but the person in charge of the investigation has been giving him a real headache. Why can't he remember their name? This is something he should remember. He frowns. Maybe he's just tired.

"I'm coming," he says, shaking the thoughts away.

Ryuk isn't here, apparently; he's probably around the house somewhere, looking for something to keep himself occupied, but that's none of Light's concern so long as he isn't causing trouble. It's not like anyone else can see him, anyway. He stands up and goes to his door.

It swings open, revealing his younger sister—who is, just as he had expected, pouting. She sighs, grabbing his wrist and pulling him towards the stairs. "Come on! You have some nerve, being late to your own birthday party!"

Light puts on a smile and laughs sheepishly. Sayu is surprisingly strong, but he's stronger; of course, he lets her pull him down the stairs anyway.

He hasn't had a real birthday celebration since he was little. His dad is normally busy, and when he isn't, the fact that he's home is a gift enough on its own. Light hasn't asked for anything since he was little, either—it just never seems necessary or worth it—so he usually gets nothing, maybe money on a year where he doesn't insist quite hard enough that he doesn't need anything. He's had outings with friends—Kamoda always jumps at the excuse to

do something fun, especially if it's related to Ichigo Berry, and he'll even talk Light into letting him pay for him as a birthday present—but it doesn't quite feel the same. It's not like when he was little. He doesn't expect it to be.

Sayu finally tugs him downstairs, and immediately, he's greeted by a chorus of "Happy birthday!"s.

Yagami Soichiro is there—at the head of the table, of course—with his suit from work still on and the faintest trace of a smile on his face. His friends from college are there, too, grinning and clapping with gift bags hanging from their arms. Everyone is standing, like they're just that excited to see him, and the smell of food wafts through his nose. He can't force himself to relax, even if he has the appearance of it, but it's... nice, still.

(There are two empty seats, he notices.)

"Light's bedroom was locked," Sayu complains as soon as the noise dies down. "Could you guys hear me? I was banging on the door for a really long time before he answered. Some nerve, right?"

"Give it a rest, Sayu," Soichiro says, stern but vaguely amused.

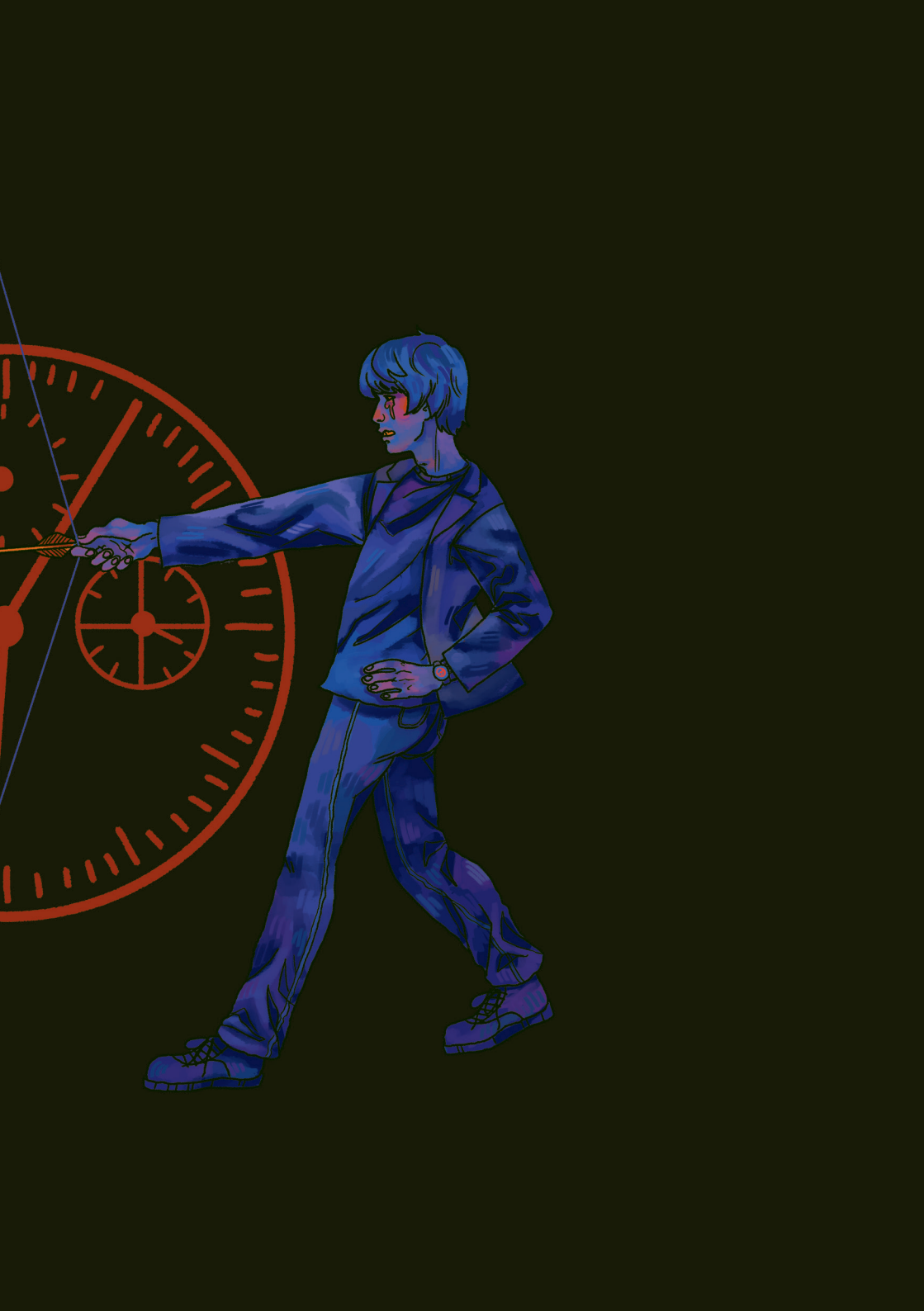
Sayu just shrugs, but in the moment Light looks at his father, he finds himself being gestured over. He makes his way to the head of the table, trying to look half as casual as he should be and not as nervous as he really is. Once he reaches Soichiro, he stops.

"Light," Soichiro says, resting a hand on his shoulder, "I'm so proud of everything you've done. Tonight, I want you to sit at the head of the table. You've earned it."

Light stares back at Soichiro, mouth dry and skin cold under his father's hand. He knows that this is a good thing, that this is what he wants, but he can't help but feel like this is wrong. Like he wasn't supposed to get it like this.

"Like this?" What does "this" even mean? Haven't you worked hard all your life? He's right; you deserve this.

Light smiles, nodding. "Thanks, Dad."



He sits down, and out of the corner of his eye, he can see Soichiro taking the seat next to him. Sayu slips behind him into the kitchen, probably to get whatever food is cooking in there, and as she disappears, Kamoda emerges with a sheepish smile on his face.

"Hey, Light," he says, shoving his hands awkwardly into his pockets. "Look, I just wanted to say sorry about last time. With Misa-Misa. It was—okay, honestly, it was shitty of me. It's not like I own her, and— I mean, if I was acting that way, then clearly you had a good reason not to have told me sooner, right? You've been my best friend since we were in high school. It'd be stupid to throw that away over some dumb girl."

Light blinks a few times. He had almost forgotten that Kamoda had been upset at him in the first place; it had just felt so small next to everything else he had been dealing with at the time, and everything he's been dealing with since then.

But it's nice to hear it, anyway. When was the last time someone told him they were sorry and meant it?

"It's fine," he answers, smiling. "I should have told you earlier. I'm just glad you're here."

Kamoda gives a relieved laugh. "Yeah, well, I'm glad to be here. Happy birthday."

He returns back to his seat just in time for Sayu to come back to the table, carrying a covered pot. She slides it down onto a coaster next to Light, then pulls the potholders off her hands and leans next to him.

"He says that," she whispers, "but I didn't invite Misa-Misa because he was coming. He seems to have forgiven you, but now he's really mad at her, for some reason. It's fine that she isn't here, right? I'd like to see her, but I figured you two would be going on a birthday date anyway."

He shrugs. "Yeah, that's fine."

"Okay, good." Sayu glances around the table. "We have someone else coming, too, but they're already really late so we decided to start without them. And, um... she said she wouldn't be able to make it today. I guess it isn't that surprising, since she's

still feeling pretty sick. Maybe next time."

Light's frowning, about to ask Sayu who she's talking about, when the doorbell rings.

"Oh!" she exclaims, bouncing up to her full height and looking to the door. "There they are!"

"Could you get it, please, Light?" Soichiro asks. "They'd probably like to see you first."

Light glances around the table and sees that everyone is smiling, like they're waiting for him to do it. He almost says no—he's at the head of the table now, after all, so doesn't he get to say for himself what he does? Hasn't he fought hard enough to get here?

But a tugging feeling in his gut tells him that he needs to do it; he needs to be the one to answer the door. So he twists his face into a smile, tells his family and his friends and their glaring white teeth that he'll be right back.

"We're so happy for you, Light," he can hear them saying as he approaches the door. "You're almost there! Congratulations! Congratulations!

CONGRATULATIONS!"

And he IS almost there, he somehow knows. Something he's worked towards for a very long time is finally coming to fruition.

The door handle is metallic and freezing cold to the touch, as if he'd just dunked his hand into stinging, icy water. Light barely feels it.

He opens the door and is greeted by a blood-drenched figure.

"Hello, Light," says L.

The resemblance is distinct, but L is unlike Light has ever seen him before. His entire face is so coated in red that there may as well be nothing else there—except for his eyes, large and black, which stare out at Light with that same unmistakable, piercing gaze as before. His hair is matted and damp, and even below his chin, his body seems to be a single mass of dark red, all blood and exposed flesh. His clothes, somehow, are untouched. They are white. Clean, as always. Of course.

Light almost lurches backwards, but he finds himself

rooted to the spot. He can't move. He can hardly breathe.

"You could at least say it back, Light. How rude," L says, dispassionate, with a screeching voice that Light can hardly hear over his own thumping heart.

All Light can do is stare. L, apparently bored of waiting, shrugs his bagged-meat shoulders and glides past him into the house. They brush arms, and an electric jolt of pain reminds Light's body how to move. He staggers away from L and jerks his head around to stare into the black void of his living room.

His friends are gone. Sayu is crying in her bedroom. Soichiro is still here (where?). L is looking back at him, but Light can't see him. L is everywhere. L is the room, and L is the house. L is the path he didn't take.

"You can't get rid of me now," says the future he could have had, and the friend he almost did. "You might have killed me, but I'm not dead. Even if you kill Near, I won't be dead. I am the emptiness inside you. I am all that you have."

Light swallows. "You're wrong. You're not—you're not anything anymore. I defeated you, and that's all that matters. That's all you ever were to me—something to defeat."

"So that's what you think... I see. It's too late now, anyways."

"I ***WON!***" Light shouts, reaching out in the darkness to grab someone he can't see. "Don't tell me it's too late—don't fucking screw with me, L Lawliet! I already won! I used the death note and I did what I had to do, and I—I made the world a better place! I'm fixing everything! Isn't that what matters? The world never changes, but I'm fixing it! That's more important than you! It's more important than me! It's more important than—"

"Come home, Light," his father says.

The world grinds to a halt. Light's words die in his throat.

COME HOME, LIGHT.

He wakes up, sweaty and gasping in his bed. His eyes blow open to the sight of Ryuk's ghoulish face,

peering at him from above with what looks like curiosity.

Light's body swings upwards so quickly that Ryuk yelps and jumps away, as if Light cares what the hell his shinigami was doing or if he happens to hit him on accident. He rubs his face in his hands, swallowing his nausea.

"You okay, Light-o?" Ryuk asks with very little concern. "You were making noises in your sleep and moving around a lot. I would've woken you up, but I thought you'd punch me or something."

Light rubs his face a few more times, takes a few deep breaths in. He doesn't want to deal with Ryuk right now. He doesn't know ***WHAT*** he wants to do, but it certainly isn't this. He can still hear Soichiro's voice echoing in his head, like a gunshot. Like a death sentence. Like... something.

He gives Ryuk a sidelong glance. "I couldn't punch you, anyway. You would just phase through it."

"Oh, yeah," Ryuk says, sounding almost surprised, as if he hadn't known that before. He's a bad actor,

even with his mask of a face, which is something like an achievement. "I guess so. Hey, what were you dreaming about? Shinigami don't have dreams, you know. They sound like fun."

Light gets out of bed and grabs a glass of water from his desk. "Not really."

"Really? Why's that?" Ryuk turns to watch him. "Hey, you didn't answer my question. What were you dreaming about?"

"Nothing."

Ryuk's jagged teeth gnash together in an even more unpleasant grin than usual. "Come on, tell me."

Light just glares at him.

"Hey, don't give me that. I bet I can guess what it was. It must've been something bad. Was it about the Kira investigation? Was it Yagami Soichiro, maybe? Or was it...?" Ryuk trails off into that ugly, hoarse cackle of his, and then it gets louder, louder, until he suddenly spreads his wings and launches up through the ceiling with a final, echoing laugh.

Light stands there for a few moments more in his locked bedroom, fist clenched and shaking.

The house is empty now.

When There's Nothing Left To Burn

For three weeks now, Mikami Teru has not really been living.

His life has always abided strictly by routine—home, work, gym, home. Errands three times a week. **"It's so robotic,"** one of his colleagues had said a few months ago. **"I don't understand how you live like that, Mikami. I respect you, but if it was me, I wouldn't feel like I was really living."** Mikami had disagreed; he knew that he was living his life in the best way that he could, that every second of his time was utilized meticulously, and he had never regretted it. He was living, in the same capacity that he always had been.

It's not the routine, then, that's the issue. Mikami Teru still wakes up at the same time every day, arrives to work at the same time, goes to the gym at the same time, returns home at the same time. He eats the same things and runs the same errands and reads the same newspapers. If any of his colleagues were to look at him, really look at him, they would find that he was as unchanging as he had been for years. Mikami Teru is the same man he always was.

But something is missing now. A part of him is gone. Every day, he walks through his life like a marionette being dragged from one place to another. He feels dead, and he doesn't know why.

It's raining today.

Storming, as a matter of fact. Mikami is sitting in the back of a taxi, hugging his suitcase to his stomach as if he's afraid to lose it. He watches the buildings drifting aimlessly past, leaning so far over that his breath condensates on the window. He had always liked the city, in a cold, satisfied sort of way; it was so large, so well-defined, with a purpose and a million moving parts that each had their own role. It was imperfect, but those imperfections could be blamed on mismanagement and misuse. At its root, it was something worth appreciation.

It still is, really. It just feels far away. Even as the taxi slows to a stop, it feels far away.

AM I AWAKE? he wonders. But he knows he's awake.

"We're here," the driver announces.

Mikami pays the fare, and their eyes lock for a moment. He almost says something, but disgust overcomes him. He jerks his hand away as soon as it's empty and steps out onto the sidewalk with a stiff "thank you."

He hadn't really wanted the driver to ask him what was wrong; in fact, he would have been mortified. The idea of unpacking the shredded fever of his mind is too revolting to consider. But still, whether Mikami had wanted it or not, the driver should have asked. It would have been the right thing to do—because when someone is suffering, you should at least ask. You should care. Everyone should care. It doesn't matter if Mikami is masking it; it doesn't matter if it's impossible to tell. You **SHOULD** be able to tell. He doesn't want anyone to be able to tell, but he knows that they should.

No one can ever really do what they should, though; or if they can, they don't. Mikami feels like he knew someone, once, who did; someone who was an exception. He doesn't remember who.

Mikami hadn't brought an umbrella with him. It had been raining when he left his house, but it just

hadn't seemed important. His body tells him he should regret it as the rain begins to seep through his suit, but he can't be moved enough to care. The cold, the wetness, they're only impermanent and paltry effects of a world that's forgotten how to turn.

He takes a few steps onto the concrete, then turns to watch the taxi float away over the slick asphalt, a sickening blot of yellow in a sea of dark gray. Almost ill, he turns back to the sidewalk, allowing his suitcase to hang at his side now instead of clutching it to his chest. There are people walking around him, but the crowd is light. They move quickly, heads down, covering themselves in one way or another. Liminal; trapped briefly between their origin and their destination. He isn't like them—but he's always known that.

He tilts his head back to look at the building in front of him, dark and looming like a great dagger in the heart of the city. The sight of it sends a surge of sick excitement through him. He's been here before. He's been here many times, he's sure, even if he doesn't know why.

There are many things Mikami Teru doesn't know.

Three weeks ago, he woke up. He was sitting outside a burning warehouse, doubled over and covered in soot and grime, surrounded by police officers, some of whom he was sure that he had seen before. He had asked where he was, why he was there, what was happening, but no one had answered, and finally he was forced into a car and driven away. After three days of questioning about Kira and notebooks and shinigami and other things he didn't understand, they returned him home. Just left him there, with no explanations and no apologies.

The first thing he did was get on his computer and look for news about Kira. Kira, apparently, had gone inactive. For some reason, he wasn't surprised. It was worse than that.

He hadn't slept that night. The night after that, though, he woke up with the smell of smoke in his nose and a voice echoing in his head. **"YOU HAVE TO SET YOURSELF ON FIRE,"** it said, over and over again.

He had bolted upright in bed, gasping and wide-eyed. There was no fire.

Something was wrong. Something **IS** wrong. He wakes up every day, sick and empty, and he goes through the motions, but nothing is the same anymore. Something has changed, something that he can't even begin to understand; he's done something horrible, or he's done something very good, but it's over now. Someone important to him is dead, but he doesn't know who; he thinks it might be Kira, and that feels right, but it doesn't feel like **ENOUGH**. He feels like there have been holes cut in his life, like someone has gone through his memory with a pair of scissors. Entire days, entire evenings, are gone. He remembers going to places he had never gone before for reasons he can't remember, seeing people he had never spoken to before for reasons he doesn't know—just flashes of reason in a great sea of nothingness. He remembers feeling happier than he had ever felt in his life. He remembers feeling afraid. He doesn't know why. He doesn't know how to find it.

He doesn't know what to do.

He remembers visiting this building before, but really, he isn't even sure what it is; an office building, probably, but for god only knows what. He

remembers visiting the rooftop. He remembers the feeling of wind against his blazer, and that's it.

Mikami blinks the rain out of his eyes and walks up to the door. He grips a handle and pulls.

It doesn't open.

He tries a few more times, but it stays shut. Like a million doors in his mind, it stays shut. Mikami wants to shout and kick and shatter the damn glass into a thousand glittering shards even if it breaks his hands, but instead, he just clenches his teeth and stares into the dim, empty lobby.

"Is it locked?"

It takes a few seconds for Mikami to realize that someone is talking to him. He turns to look at the speaker, and his eyes immediately go wide.

Amane Misa looks the same, but different, somehow. She doesn't have an umbrella, either, and the rain is dripping from her jacket. There are smudges on her face, as if she'd wiped away her makeup once she'd realized it was running off anyways. Her hair

has turned dark brown from all the water, but she has those same doe-like eyes, that same lingering pout to her lips. The Amane Misa that he saw on advertisements and television always seemed so happy, but he remembered how she looked in his office, all heartbroken and torn apart and screaming in vain at the injustice of the world. This Amane Misa is neither. She seems sad, unspeakably sad, but more than that—

She's empty. She's like him.

They're connected in more ways than that, somehow; he can feel it. But it's out of his reach, just like everything else is.

He blinks a few times. "Yes, it is."

"Really?" she asks, pushing past him to yank at the door herself. He hopes, for a moment, that it'll open for her, as if she knows some sort of secret password he doesn't—but it stays closed, of course.

"Oh, come **ON!**" Amane shouts, jiggling the door handle with more violence than Mikami would expect from someone of her stature. She tries several more

times before giving up, then turns on her heel and leans back against the smooth glass door, arms crossed. She stands there for a few moments, body still and eyes glaring angry into the street, before Mikami realizes she's starting to cry.

She had cried in his office plenty of times. He could hardly blame her; no, all he felt was rage, rage at Nishida Kyu for ruining so many lives, rage at the court for letting him get away with it, rage at society for allowing these crimes to happen over and over again. Despite working with victims in cases like these for years, he had never been good at comforting people.

He still isn't. He just looks at her for a moment before turning his eyes to the street, too.

"Why are you here?" he asks, finally.

She's quiet for a second, swallowing her tears. Finally, she says, "Why are you?"

They don't look at each other.

"It just felt right," he says, honestly. He's not sure

why he's telling her the truth. "I felt like I needed to be here. Like there was something I needed to do."

"What were you going to do?"

"I don't know."

"We're probably here for the same reason." Amane rubs her eyes. "It wasn't supposed to rain today. I did my makeup for nothing. Can you believe that?"

"I—"

Suddenly, Amane reaches over and grabs Mikami's wrist in her small, cold hands, with a grip that reminds him of a corpse.

"Did you know Yagami Light?"

His heart lurches in his chest.

"He was my boyfriend," she continues, voice hard and shaking. "We were supposed to get married. He died three weeks ago. They wouldn't let me see his body. They didn't let his sister see it, either—they

said that he burned to death. Light was so handsome. I can't imagine him—burning to death."

Mikami stares at her, horrified. Their eyes lock, and he feels, for some reason, like they have the same eyes. The same tired eyes.

"Did you know Yagami Light?" she repeats.

He swallows, numb. "I did. I don't know why."

"Do you have gaps in your memory?" she asks, stepping towards him. "Things you feel like you should remember, but you can't? Do you feel... like something's missing? Do you feel empty?"

He looks at her, dizzy and sick. He feels like there was a bond between them, once, that is dead now. They're strangers. Something has been destroyed.

"I do," he says honestly, desperately, and he can feel everything and nothing at all.

She stares back at him for a few moments, almost like she's waiting for something to happen, before finally pulling away.

"We're the same, then," she says. "But I don't know why, either, so don't bother asking."

He nods mutely. He can't think of what to say to that, so he looks back out at the street.

For a few silent moments, he doesn't think anything at all. He aches; that's all he does.

"What's in your suitcase?" Amane asks, suddenly.

Mikami blinks and looks down at his suitcase. He has to repeat the question to himself in his head before he glances back to Amane and says, "Nothing. I just felt like bringing it with me."

She laughs, a hollow, dead sort of noise. Maybe they're both dead; maybe everyone is. Maybe the entire world has burned to ashes and somehow, somehow, it left them behind, and now they're here, together, two broken people trapped in a broken landscape that had turned alien when they weren't looking. Maybe this is all there is, forever.

"Let me walk you home," he says, without really thinking.

She frowns. "It's a long walk."

"I'll walk with you anyway."

Her eyes linger on him, tired and unreadable, and then she shrugs. "Fine."

Together, they walk down the sidewalk. They don't look at each other. The rain soaks them both to the bone until there's nothing left but smoke and ashes.

イチゴBERRY
MISA MISA
SERINA & MAKO

Conquest in Black Binding

Higuchi wakes up late Sunday morning, tired and hungover. The lady he'd brought home with him last night—what was her name again?—is long gone, and his bed feels cold. It's just as well. Higuchi doesn't like being around other people when he's hungover, and he certainly doesn't like clingy women.

His memories of last night are vague; he went to some bar with Ooi and Kida, and Kida whined the entire time (like he always does) so Higuchi started hitting on the first woman he saw and got the hell out of there. Ooi probably ended up doing the same thing; that's just the effect Kida has on people. Hell, Kida isn't the only one; Namikawa is pedantic and Mido is judgemental and Takahashi is stupid and Shimura is creepy and Hatori is a suck-up. Talking with any of them outside of work is a waste of time. Ooi is fine, though, which is why Higuchi always asks him out for drinks first. Still, he's not good enough company for Higuchi to feel bad for abandoning him with Kida. It was Ooi who invited Kida in the first place, after all.

It's the bit after leaving that he can't remember so well, but Higuchi can put two and two together.

He does this all the time; it's just what you do when you're as rich and handsome as he is. You have food, so you feast. That's life.

That is Higuchi Kyosuke's philosophy: take what you can and have a good time doing it. He doesn't say it out loud very often, or even think about it, for that matter, but he lives it. He is, in most senses, a completely average example of a wealthy young executive.

He rolls out of bed, still in his underwear, and stumbles over to his bathroom. Swallows down something for his headache, stares blankly into the mirror.

Higuchi Kyosuke is 37 years old, but looks several years younger. He believes in taking care of himself, but not enough to worry over it. In the morning, he listens to jazz music while he drives to work even though he doesn't really care for music in general. After that, he clocks in at the office, and all his subordinates try their best to hide, or at least look busy. They're afraid of him; at least, they're afraid of the idea of Higuchi Kyosuke that he decided many years ago to become, which is identical to the idea

of Namikawa Reiji and Hatori Arayoshi and Mido Shingo and all the other hungry executives. It's some kind of abstraction. But really, if you shake Higuchi's warm hand and look into the arrogant thing that you might call his smile, you'll be able to tell: he's animated by the same ugly thing that animates all of them. Under that, there's no soul.

Higuchi Kyosuke isn't thinking anything so introspective as he stares back at his barely-conscious reflection. The skeletal thing behind him is certainly thinking about it, though.

(Shinigami don't need to breathe, but Rem sighs anyway. If this is for Misa, she can tolerate it, but she still resents Yagami for assigning her the task of following around the most unbearable person she could find for the foreseeable future. Alas, she's already stalled for long enough.)

Higuchi doesn't even notice the notebook as it glides through the air to tap him on the back. He very much notices the reflection of the white—**THING** behind him, though. In fact, he notices it so much that he screams and wheels around to face it, shoving his body back against the countertop.

"What the hell are you?!" he screeches.

The white thing opens its purple-painted mouth. "Higuchi Kyosuke, you have been chosen to receive a power that—"

"WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU?!" he screeches again.

It looks at him with its single yellow eye, cold and unreadable. "I am the shinigami Rem. I am not here to hurt you."

Higuchi glances wildly around for something that he could use to fight off a tall white skeleton monster—shinigami—and sees exactly nothing. There might be something in his bedroom, but the shinigami is between it and him. He sure as hell isn't taking it on with nothing but his fists, and he can't escape, either. He wishes he had stayed in bed.

The shinigami is tall enough to fill the doorway to his bathroom, but not enough to reach the ceiling. It seems to be entirely constructed of bones, white and chalky, except for what look to be thick locks of pale hair. One of its eyes is covered by clean, tightly-wrapped bandages, and the other is entirely

yellow with a cat-like pupil. There's something odd about it, aside from the obvious—something transposed, something wrong about its textures. It looks almost fake, and Higuchi would wonder if he was hallucinating if he weren't so convinced of his own mental fortitude.

He swallows. "What do you want from me?"

"As I was trying to say," the shinigami continues coldly, "you have been chosen to receive Kira's power."

Higuchi stares dumbly at it for a moment, eyes wide. He's almost entirely naked, hair unstyled and eyes still crusted with sleep; he's scared enough to have forgotten his headache, but that's hardly a comfort. He feels like a trapped animal, after a life of being free and superior. Nothing makes sense.

"Move," he says.

The shinigami steps aside, still watching him with cruel eyes, and Higuchi spares it a frenzied glance as he half-stumbles back into his room. He throws his drawers open and pulls on the first thing he can

find, then glares behind him. The thing hasn't moved. He drags his hands over his face.

What the fuck. What the fuck.

"I've been chosen to receive Kira's power?" he repeats, half to himself and half to the shinigami. "What the hell does that even mean?"

"You know what Kira is," it states. "His power—the power to kill with a name and a face—can be transferred between people. Kira asked me to find a new human to possess this power in his place. You have been chosen."

It's all just too bizarre; it's unthinkable. Higuchi's life has been an unfailing routine for years now, and it has been perfect as it is, aside from the fact that it has never been enough. The first thought to grip him, even despite the shock, is that with Kira's power, he could make it enough. It could be everything he's ever wanted.

Higuchi has never been unlucky. Thanks to his father's influence, he's practically cruised through his entire life—and the good looks and charisma have

helped, even if he isn't exactly stupid or unintelligent. He knows that. He also knows, rationally, that there are other people who deserve success just as much as him, if not more. He knows this, but why should he care?

Higuchi Kyosuke is not the type of man to turn his back on an opportunity, no matter how unethical or unbelievable.

"You're serious?" he asks, drawing himself up to his full height and staring back at the shinigami. He presses his hands back against his dresser until they stop trembling. "You're not going to—kill me?"

"Of course I am serious," it answers. "And I do not intend to kill you before the end of your natural lifespan. If you agree to carry out Kira's regular execution of criminals, then I will permit you to use Kira's power in any other ways you see fit."

Any other ways you see fit.

Higuchi runs his tongue over his dry lips. "I'll do it. Just tell me how and I'll do it, shinigami."

"My name is Rem," it says, and if it sounds irritated, Higuchi doesn't notice. "Kira's weapon is a notebook. Any human whose name is written in it will die. Only those who have touched the notebook can see me. As long as you keep it hidden and do not draw suspicion to yourself, you will not be caught. And you need not pay attention to the rules in the back—they are a joke, created before I came to possess it."

Rem—who actually looks fairly feminine despite being a lanky bone monster, Higuchi realizes—comes over to his side of the room in a sort of half-walking half-floating motion that he can't quite describe. It (she?) extends a hand and offers him a black notebook.

He takes it. The English words "Death Note" are written on the front. He snorts.

Higuchi hurries down the stairs, acutely aware that Rem is following after him. He turns the corner into his living room and flicks on the TV. Sits down. Flips through the death note's rules, grabs a pen off his coffee table. Switches the channel to a news broadcast he doesn't like—they'd helped to break

this story a few years ago, something about Yotsuba's waste not being disposed of in accordance with environmental standards, and it had caused a bit of a fuss. Watches just long enough to remember the anchor's name. Slowly, carefully, writes her name in the notebook—then, after a moment of hesitation, adds "accident" next to it.

Forty seconds later, he's watching the poor woman's head get crushed underneath a light fixture. The screen switches to a technical difficulties card, but the deed is done. She wasn't that pretty, anyway.

The hairs on Higuchi's arms raise.

He leans back in his seat, resting his hand over his mouth. His eyes narrow. For just a moment, he feels ill, but it's gone as soon as it came, leaving behind it a trail of frenzied excitement. He can't help it; he laughs.

AS LONG AS YOU KEEP IT HIDDEN AND DO NOT DRAW SUSPICION TO YOURSELF, YOU WILL NOT BE CAUGHT. Luckily, Higuchi already has a few ideas about how to keep himself under the radar while still improving his prospects. He doesn't dislike his colleagues; he might be critical of them, sure, but that's just the

kind of person he is. He doesn't treat them poorly. In truth, he's very kind—kind enough to share a piece of the pie with them.

Even if it's only temporary. Even if he'll have to get rid of them when he's done.

Higuchi Kyosuke covers his face with his hands and laughs.

(Behind him, Rem watches, her expression unchanging. What a farce, she thinks, that such a wretched human could achieve power. It's a lucky thing that this is only temporary.)

Merch

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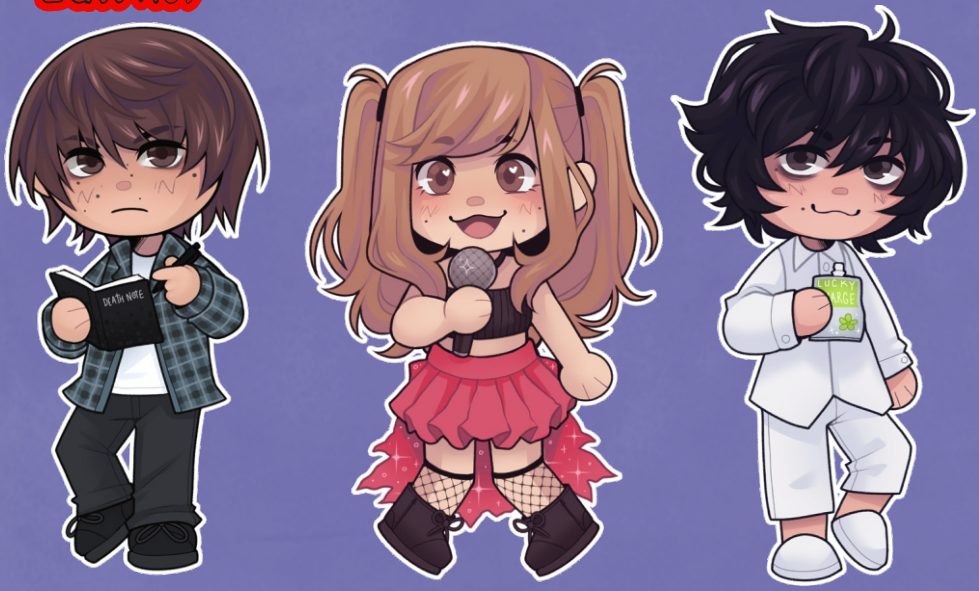

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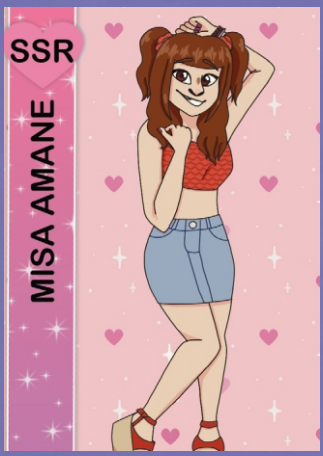

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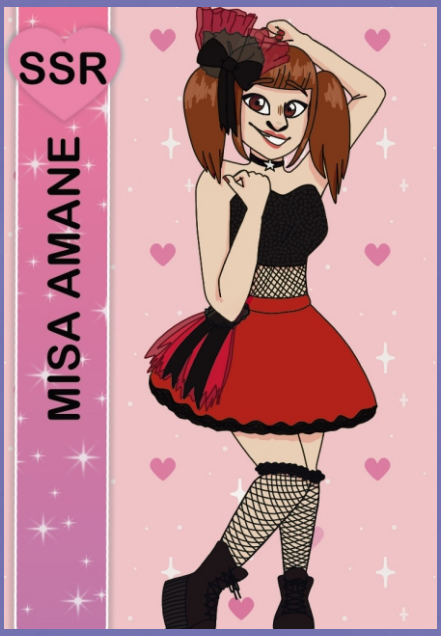

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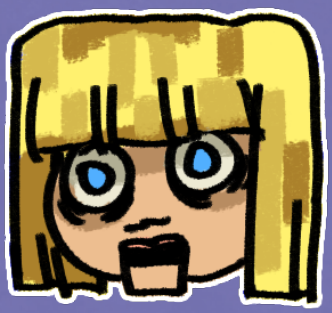

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